

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IMPROVE SCHOOL AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents significant opportunity for school leaders to shape the systems and services necessary to genuinely improve outcomes for *all* students. Specifically, the law provides for much greater emphasis on and flexibility in decision-making and funding options related to:

- supporting student mental and behavioral health,
- improving school climate and safety,
- implementing meaningful assessment and accountability systems, and
- enhancing the coordination of comprehensive service delivery to help students succeed.

Tapping the expertise of specialized instructional support personnel (SISP), such as school psychologists, can be an incredibly powerful resource in addressing these critical areas of school improvement. In fact, ESSA *requires* meaningful consultation with SISP in the development of Title I plans and other school improvement efforts. School psychologists, in particular, have specific expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior; positive school climate, safety, and crisis prevention and response; consultation and collaboration; data collection and interpretation at the individual and systems levels; and program evaluation. School psychologists help foster partnerships among families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community. The following highlights key areas for which school psychologists can help school leaders improve school and student success.

Effectively engaging your school psychologist is a smart step in the successful implementation of ESSA to improve learning and success for all students.

INFORMING MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Although ESSA maintains many of the current assessment and accountability requirements, it promotes a broader definition of school and student success beyond performance on standardized tests. Effective accountability systems help identify and offer the appropriate supports needed for schools struggling to meet student needs and allow a reasonable time to improve and appropriate response when schools fail to progress. At the school building level, effective systems identify and offer appropriate supports for individual students and groups of students struggling academically, behaviorally, and/or socially or emotionally. This requires the collection of relevant data that can be used to identify successes and areas for improvement, such as: academic achievement, behavioral health indicators, perceptions of the school environment, college and/or career readiness skills, indicators of educator effectiveness, and factors that contribute to positive learning environments, including school connectedness and safety.

These data should not be interpreted in isolation. Rather, they must be examined in a coordinated fashion to identify connections that should influence decision-making related to instruction, programming, and learning supports and services. School psychologists have unique expertise that should be utilized to:

- Help schools and districts maintain accountability by assisting in data collection and analysis, progress monitoring, and effective problem solving.
- Contribute to the comprehensive, valid, and reliable measurement of academic, social, emotional, mental, and behavioral health indicators.
- Help school leadership teams to develop data-based targets for yearly school improvement goals.

- Effectively evaluate programs and initiatives focused on developing supportive learning environments.
- Consult with classroom teachers on how to embed formative assessment in order to inform instructional efficacy and to improve students' mastery of curriculum.

SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Students' mental and behavioral health underlies every aspect of learning and influences the culture and climate of the school. Importantly, access to school-based mental health services is linked to improving students' physical and psychological safety, and it reduces costly negative outcomes such as disciplinary incidents, delinquency, and dropout. ESSA authorizes various funding streams to improve schools' capacity to provide necessary *comprehensive* mental and behavioral services that include prevention and wellness promotion, early identification and early intervention, and targeted supports for individual and groups of students. School psychologists are uniquely qualified to:

- Provide mental and behavioral health services for individual students and groups of students.
- Implement wellness promotion programs such as social–emotional learning in classrooms.
- Develop and monitor universal mental health screening processes to identify students in need of mental and behavioral health services, or concerns affecting the entire school community.
- Provide inservice training in addressing student mental and behavioral health and Mental Health First Aid.

Full realization of these efforts requires adequate funding at the local, state, and federal levels; effective blending of funding streams; committed leadership; meaningful collaboration with school psychologists; and consistent efforts to work toward the NASP recommended staffing ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500–700 students.

Some districts mistakenly consider outsourcing all mental health services to community providers as way to save money. This approach runs contrary to both long-term sustainability and availability of services to all students. Community partnerships to improve student mental health are most effective when the school psychologist, and other school-employed mental health professionals, are integrally involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of comprehensive school mental health service delivery systems.

IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SCHOOL SAFETY

Feeling safe and supported is a necessary condition for students to learn and achieve. ESSA offers opportunities for schools and districts to support student success through efforts to create safe and supportive learning environments; implement effective discipline policies and practice; foster engagement and supportive positive relationships among students, staff, and families; and balance physical safety with psychological safety. School psychologists can support the effective implementation of these efforts and have specific skills to:

- Develop and lead crisis prevention and response policy and practice efforts at the district and school levels.
- Evaluate and select *evidence-based* measures of school climate that lead to meaningful school improvement.
- Develop, implement, and evaluate practices that promote safe school environments.
- Provide professional development to teachers, staff, and families to support:
 - Trauma informed practices
 - Crisis prevention, intervention, and recovery efforts
 - Suicide prevention and intervention
 - Threat assessment
 - Positive discipline practices

RELATED RESOURCES

- Leveraging Essential School Practices, ESSA, MTSS, and the NASP Practice Model: A Crosswalk to Help Every School and Student Succeed <http://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/current-law-and-policy-priorities/policy-priorities/the-every-student-succeeds-act/essa-crosswalk>
- NASP Practice Model Implementation Guide <http://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/nasp-practice-model-implementation-guide>